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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, may our lawmakers delight today in Your guidance, finding joy in their fellowship with You. Lord, strengthen them by this fellowship, enabling them to be like productive trees planted by streams of water.

Lord, give our Senators the wisdom to live for Your glory, using them to provide deliverance for captives and freedom for the oppressed.

In you, O God, we find refuge. Continue to guide us, strong deliverer, for we are pilgrims in this life.

We pray in Your sovereign Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 60 seconds as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EAGLES ACT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, we are all very much concerned about several mass instances of violence around the country. The Secret Service has a program of alerting people to some of those things and training people.

Understanding the common factors of the past acts of mass violence can help

us prevent future tragedies. The Secret Service, through its National Threat Assessment Center, compiles and studies data on these risk factors.

Yesterday, the Secret Service released its report entitled "Mass Attacks in Public Spaces," which confirms that there are often warning signs before targeted violence.

Following up on the expertise of the Secret Service, I introduced a bill that goes by the acronym EAGLES Act to expand the National Threat Assessment Center to conduct additional research and training to prevent targeted violence.

Congress should pass this law to help stop violence before it happens.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, later today, all Senators will have the opportunity to receive a classified briefing on an issue of huge national importance: the security and integrity of our elections.

It is fitting that today's session be one bipartisan, all-Member briefing because, while it is a cliché to say that certain priorities ought to be above partisan squabbling, I know that every one of us shares a genuine concern in maintaining the process through which American democracy plays out.

Those of my colleagues who have read the January 2017 intelligence assessment and the Mueller report will understand that it is precisely our unity and our faith in our democratic system that Vladimir Putin seeks to undermine.

Along with Americans' First Amendment rights to express themselves and speak out, there are few things more

fundamental to the maintenance of our Republic than the electoral process itself.

Thomas Paine wrote, "The right of voting for representatives is the primary right by which other rights are protected."

So preserving and protecting the elections that our State and local authorities conduct is a crucial task. From the Federal Government's perspective, States are firmly in the lead, but sometimes that means lending a hand to local authorities. Obviously, during the Civil Rights era, for example, some Federal guidelines were necessary to preserve integrity.

But many other times, doing the right thing means defending against interference, be it political interference in the constitutionally protected role of the States to conduct elections by politicians and bureaucrats here in Washington or, certainly, interference from America's adversaries abroad.

In 2016, Vladimir Putin sought to interfere in our elections. I have read the intelligence reports. I have read the Mueller report. I have talked with our Intelligence Committee, which has investigated this in depth and has a report coming out soon.

It is important to put Putin's efforts to interfere in our democracy in context because he didn't just decide in 2016 to take such a bold step. He kind of worked up to it, undermining an array of U.S. interests slowly but surely over 8 years of the previous administration's misguided approach to Russia.

Under President Obama, the U.S.-Russia relationship seemed to be defined by two constants: Putin's growing assertiveness in foreign meddling and the administration's failure to confront it.

Putin's 2008 invasion of the sovereign country of Georgia was met by the so-called reset in 2009, which swept the aggression under the rug. The United States may have reset our policy to

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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business as usual, but Putin's aggression continued full bore.

There was the failure to respond to Putin's efforts to strangle democracy in his own country by shuttering western NGOs, arresting dissidents, or possibly ordering the murder of political opponent Boris Nemtsov.

To the extent that the United States responded to the torture and murder by Russian authorities of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, it was due to congressional pressure.

There was also President Obama's response to Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Do any of my colleagues believe the administration's response to that outrageous assault on the sovereignty of Ukraine was sufficiently tough to defend against Putin's outrageous assault on fundamental principles of sovereignty and the international order?

There was the debacle with the President's redline in Syria, which turned out to be more like a red carpet for Russian influence in Syria and the Middle East.

And there was the President telling Putin's puppet Medvedev that he could have more "flexibility" to treat Russia differently once he became a lame duck.

All this was under a President who thought it was a clever laugh line to mock our now-colleague Senator ROMNEY for correctly labeling Russia as a threat.

The consequences of American weakness toward Russia were numerous. The more Obama gave, the more Putin took.

Among those consequences, as we all know, was that Putin felt sufficiently emboldened to seek to interfere in our 2016 Presidential election. Through efforts to divide Americans on social media and to hack a political party, agents of a foreign government sought to inject division, doubt, and chaos into our democracy—a sad and embarrassing episode.

President Trump has expressed an interest in a better relationship with Russia, but the actions his administration has taken—which he has authorized—demonstrate that such a relationship will not prevent America from pushing back against Russian aggression.

The administration has pushed back against Russia in meaningful ways, imposing new costs on Putin and his cronies for their malign activities and improving our defenses against Russian active measures. We have adopted new national security and defense strategies that treat Russian aggression like the serious threat that it is. We have begun to rebuild our military strength, which was eroded by years of budget cuts and further damaged by sequestration. We have taken steps to provide Georgia and Ukraine with arms to defend against Russian aggression—weapons denied to them by the previous administration despite bipartisan support from Congress. We worked to block Moscow's efforts to increase European reliance on Russian oil and gas. Sec-

retary Mattis led efforts—continued by his successors—to reform and strengthen NATO.

So important changes are underway at the strategic level. Now we are back to projecting the strength, principle, and resolve that America ought to project.

In addition, the Trump administration has also punched back in very specific ways in response to the election interference that happened on the Obama administration's watch. Thanks to the work of the Special Counsel and the Department of Justice, 28 Russian nationals, intelligence officers, and corporate interests were indicted for their participation in the interference. And in 2018, the administration expelled another 60 Russian agents in response to the poisoning of a former official living in the United Kingdom. These agents are no longer free to conduct intelligence operations or active measures here in America.

These are all tough, important steps that pertain to our broader foreign policy efforts to defer future threats, but there has also been significant work done specifically on our election security. The administration worked quickly to address vulnerabilities and ensure that 2018 wouldn't be a reprise of 2016.

The administration directed resources through the Department of Homeland Security to help local election authorities implement stronger cybersecurity measures. Information sharing was streamlined between DHS, FBI, and State and local officials.

They worked hard to gain the trust of State election officials in my State of Kentucky and around the country and provide them with valuable information through a voluntary information-sharing program that has seen participation from all 50 States and 1,400 localities.

Here in Congress, we appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars in additional aid for State governments to strengthen their systems, and our efforts continue. This year's Defense and Intelligence authorization bills include provisions that will help defend ourselves and our allies against Russian aggression.

The administration will brief us today in classified session about the many steps U.S. agencies have taken since 2016 to improve our defenses and bolster our deterrence against adversaries who seek to undermine our democracy.

The smooth and secure execution of the 2018 election illustrates the success of these measures. This was not a coincidence.

Congress has taken even further action since then, building new legislative safeguards to increase transparency and coordination with the intelligence community on election security.

In short, it is abundantly clear that the administration and Congress take this issue seriously. I look forward to hearing more from the administration

today about what steps have led to this greater success and what even further safeguards they are working on in advance of 2020.

Of course, Congress will need to continue closely monitoring the progress and assess whether future legislative steps might be needed as well. But, as with any time when Washington politicians are clamoring to grab greater control over something this important, we need to make sure this conversation is clear-eyed and sober and serious.

I remember it was President Obama's first Chief of Staff who said: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." In other words, bad news can give politicians cover to do things they have wanted to do for a long time.

Remember, it was only months ago that the new Democratic majority in the House decided their top priority for the entire Congress was a massive bill I called the Democratic politician protection act—a sprawling Federal power grab over election law and citizens' political speech.

Among other provisions, it would make the FEC, the currently non-partisan body that regulates political speech, into a partisan weapon.

They also want to give Washington more power to prohibit citizens groups from weighing in on politicians' job performance. They have twice passed bills aimed at centralizing election administration decisions in the Federal Government, in part on the hope that election attorneys, not voters, will get to determine the outcome of more elections—provision after provision that would erode longstanding safeguards. That was the huge proposal just a few months ago.

In light of this, it is interesting that some of our colleagues across the aisle seem to have already made up their minds before we hear from the experts later today that a brandnew, sweeping Washington intervention is just what the doctor ordered.

I, for one, am looking forward to listening to the experts, to hearing more about why the Trump administration was more successful in 2018 than the Obama administration was in 2016. I look forward to ensuring that any additional Federal action actually addresses the problems at hand; that it preserve, rather than undermine, the careful checks and balances that have long been key parts of American democracy since the beginning.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I understand there are two bills at the desk due for a second reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2740) making appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for other purposes.